

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MEXICO 2511

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR, ASEC, MX

SUBJECT: PATTERSON KIDNAPPING; PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

1. THE FIRST PHASE OF THE PATTERSON CASE WAS MARKED BY HECTIC ACTIVITY AND MOVEMENT: JOHN PATTERSON'S DISAPPEARANCE ON FRIDAY NOON; THE DISCOVERY AT THE CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE RANSOM NOTE; NOTIFICATION OF THE EMBASSY DEPT AND GOM OFFICIALS; THE FLIGHT OF EMBASSY OFFICIALS TO HERMOSILLO, THE TRIP BY MRS. JOHN PATTERSON TO TUCSON, NOGALES, AND BACK TO HERMOSILLO; AND THE STAND-IN OPERATION UNDERTAKEN IN MEXICO CITY LAST NIGHT. UNFORTUNATELY, DESPITE THE GOOD-WILL EFFORTS OF MRS. PATTERSON TO COMPLY WITH THE DEMANDS OF THE KIDNAP NOTE, NO CONTACTS HAVE BEEN MADE, AND IT CANNOT BE FORETOLD WHEN THIS MAY OCCUR. THUS, BY MID-DAY MONDAY, WE SEEM TO BE ENTERING A SECOND PHASE OF THE CASE.

2. ONE VERY POSITIVE ASPECT OF THIS AFFAIR HAS BEEN THE WHOLE-HEARTED ACCEPTANCE BY THE GOM OF FULL RESPONSIBILITY IN THIS CASE. SECRETARY OF GOVERNMENT MARIO MOYA PALENCIA HAS BEEN IN FREQUENT COMMUNICATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR AND HAS REITERATED THE DETERMINATION OF THE GOM TO "DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO SAVE THE LIFE OF THIS YOUNG MAN". GOM ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD HAVE INCLUDED THE SENDING OF MEXICO'S TOP SECURITY TEAM FOR DISCREET HERMOSILLO-NOGALES OPERATIONS. OUR LEGATT EXPRESSES VIEW COOPERATION LIKELY CONTINUE ALONG THESE LINES UNTIL CASE IS CLOSED, AND WE SHARE THIS VIEW.

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3. AS WE ENTER PHASE TWO, AND AS THE HECTIC PACE OF RECENT DAYS SLACKENS SOMEWHAT, IT IS AN APPROPRIATE TIME TO OFFER SOME VERY TENTATIVE HYPOTHESES AS TO THE ORIGINS AND POSSIBLE OUTCOME OF THIS CASE. WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THESE POSSIBILITIES ARE ALSO BEING CONSIDERED BY GOM, ALTHOUGH IT SHOULD BE STRESSED THAT NEITHER WE NOR THE GOM, IN REVIEWING POSSIBILITIES, HAVE DISCARDED ANY, AND THAT THE SAFE RETURN OF PATTERSON REMAINS OUR OVER-RIDING OBJECTIVE.

4. THERE ARE OBVIOUSLY MANY POSSIBILITIES WHICH MUST BE CONSIDERED, PARTICULARLY THE FOLLOWING:

A) THAT THE KIDNAPPING WAS PERPETRATED BY A POLITICAL GROUP, EITHER MEXICAN OR US. IN MANY WAYS, THE CASE DIFFERS MARKEDLY FROM THE LEONHARDY CASE OR OTHER CLEARLY POLITICAL KIDNAPPINGS WHICH HAVE OCCURRED IN MEXICO. DESPITE THE PERFUNCTORY POLITICAL LANGUAGE (WHICH LACKS IDEOLOGICAL CONTENT) AT END OF RANSOM NOTE, VARIOUS ASPECTS OF CASE (E.G., NO REQUEST FOR RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS, DELIBERATE INSTRUCTION TO AVOID PRESS PUBLICITY) SEEM TO LESSEN LIKELIHOOD OF POLITICAL BASIS FOR KIDNAPPING.

B) THAT KIDNAPPING HAD GOAL OF CRIMINAL EXTORTION, PERPETRATED BY MEXICAN, U.S., OR MIXED GROUP. GOM OBVIOUSLY CONVINCED THERE IS INVOLVEMENT OF AMERICANS, WHATEVER THEIR MOTIVATION. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT PERPETRATORS ARE IN ANY SENSE "PROFESSIONALS"(CRIMINALS OR TERRORIST) IN LIGHT OF AMATEURISH AND VAGUE QUALITY OF INSTRUCTIONS CONTAINED IN RANSOM NOTE AND FAILURE TO MAKE CONTACT.

C) ONE POSSIBILITY WHICH MUST BE CONSIDERED, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF GOM'S REPEATED RETURN TO THIS THEORY, IS THAT WHOLE AFFAIR IS HOAX CARRIED OUT BY JOHN PATTERSON, WITH OR WITHOUT ACCOMPLICES INCLUDING PERHAPS HIS WIFE. UNDER THIS ASSUMPTION, IT MIGHT BE EXPECTED THAT IF WHATEVER PLANS MAY HAVE ORIGINALLY BEEN ENVISAGED FAIL TO BEAR FRUIT, THEN PATTERSON MAY APPEAR SOONER OR LATER WITH "RELEASE" OR "ESCAPE" STORY.

5. WE SEE USG OBJECTIVES AS FOLLOW IN ORDER OF PRIORITY:
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A) MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ASSURE SAFE RETURN OF PATTERSON WITHIN USG POLICY FRAMEWORK OF NO OFFICIAL USE RANSOM AND OF PLACING PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROTECTION, WELFARE, AND SAFE RETURN OF PATTERSON UPON HOST GOVERNMENT. THIS OBJECTIVE INCLUDES ACTING, AS APPROPRIATE AS FRIENDLY INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN GOM AND FAMILY.

B) IN FURTHERING FOREGOING OBJECTIVE, MAINTAIN FREQUENT CONTACT WITH GOM OFFICIALS AT APPROPRIATE TOP AND OPERATIONAL LEVELS, PROVIDING ENCOURAGEMENT AS WELL AS EXERTING FRIENDLY BUT FIRM PRESSURE AS MAY BE REQUIRED UPON GOM TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVE NOTED ABOVE.

6. IN CONSIDERING EVENTUALITIES, POSSIBILITY ENVISAGED IN PARA 4 (C) ABOVE WOULD, IF TRUE, BE CAUSE OF EMBARRASSMENT WHICH USG MUST, OF COURSE, ANTICIPATE AND SEEK TO MINIMIZE.

7. EMBASSY TASK FORCE IS ESTABLISHED ON 24-HOUR BASIS. OPERATIONALLY, TF IS FLEXIBLY STAFFED WITH PROCEDURES UNDER CONSTANT REVIEW TO PROVIDE FOR ANY NEW DEVELOPMENTS AS THEY OCCUR WHILE MAINTAINING EMBASSY OPERATIONS AS NEAR NORMAL AS POSSIBLE, ALWAYS SUBORDINATING ROUTINE WORK TO REQUIREMENTS OF PRESENT SITUATION. TF WILL SUBMIT SITREP REGULARLY AT 6:30 AM, 12:30 NOON AND 10:00 PM. (MEXICO CITY TIMES) WITH ADDITIONAL SUBMISSION INTERSPERSED AS REQUIRED BY DEVELOPMENTS. EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING DEPARTMENT SITREPS OR OTHER SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION TO CONFIRM TELECONS.

8. COMMENT: IT IS VITAL THAT WE KEEP ALWAYS IN MIND THE FACT THAT PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IS SAFE RETURN PATTERSON. TO ACCOMPLISH THIS WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO KEEP AN OPEN MIND IN THIS CASE, AND MAINTAIN OUR CLOSE COORDINATION WITH THE GOM AND THE PATTERSON FAMILY. WE SHOULD BE FULLY PREPARED TO PROVIDE ALL APPROPRIATE COMFORT AND ASSISTANCE TO MRS. PATTERSON AND HER FAMILY, AND TO PROTECT THE FAMILY'S INTERESTS. WHATEVER THE ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESES, WHICH WE SHOULD CRITICALLY EXAMINE, WE SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THE CONSIDERATION THAT MRS. PATTERSON IS ACTING IN GOOD
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FAITH. WE WILL, OF COURSE, CONTINUE TO ASSIST THE GOM AS REQUESTED AND APPROPRIATE, RECOGNIZING THAT THEY MAINTAIN OPERATIONAL CONTROL AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CASE. THIS INCLUDES ACTING WHERE APPROPRIATE AS FRIENDLY INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN GOM AND FAMILY.
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